

Revival 2 “Jesus Saves!”

Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All: **Amen.**

Leader: Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful

All: **And kindle in them the fire of your love.**

Leader: Send forth your Spirit, and they shall be created

All. **And You shall renew the face of the earth.**

Leader: Let us pray.

All: **O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.**

The Lord be with you. R/ A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. Luke

When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified Jesus and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left. Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.” They divided his garments by casting lots. The people stood by and watched; the rulers, meanwhile, sneered at him and said, “He saved others, let him save himself if he is the chosen one, the Messiah of God.” Even the soldiers jeered at him. As they approached to offer him wine they called out, “If you are King of the Jews, save yourself.” Above him there was an inscription that read, “This is the King of the Jews.”

Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us.” The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, “Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” He replied to him, “Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

The Gospel of the Lord

My friends, God exists, God made you, and God loves you. That is what we celebrated at our first night of Revival. As you may remember, we discussed many ways that we can come to knowledge of the existence of God through the light of reason, what we call natural revelation. If you see a garden in a forest, we can deduce that there is a gardener somewhere. We live in a creation and so we can rationally conclude that there is a Creator. Meanwhile, name one other species on the planet that has been building temples to worship God since the very beginning. We are clearly hardwired for God. It is what we mean when we say we are made in the image and likeness of God.

God made us so to have a relationship with us and he speaks to us. This is what we call divine revelation. We call the Bible “the Word of God” for a reason. The Bible is God speaking to us through people and communities throughout the centuries. The Bible is a living word not a dead one because the people in this story of our salvation are our people. They are us. We are them. Bottom line, what better way for God to speak to us than by becoming one of us? If God exists, if God created us and if God loves us, it makes sense that God would in fact visit us. John’s Gospel begins by describing Jesus as the Word of God made flesh. The Gospels call Jesus “Emmanuel”. This is a word that mean “God has visited his people”. The word Jesus itself literally means “God saves”. God saves us through Jesus. What is it that we need saving from?

My friends, let us reflect on our basic situation. All of us have the experience of being born into this world in mystery. We didn’t choose it and yet here we are. All of us at some point asked ourselves the question, who am I? Why do I exist? What is my purpose? As we grow up, we stumble in the darkness trying to find answers to these questions. We discover the beauty of our existence and the gifts we have along the way. However, we also become very familiar with the brokenness inside of us, our flaws and our failings. As we grow older, we also become acutely aware of our mortality, how fragile life really is and that we simply cannot save ourselves.

On the one hand, we know in our hearts that we are hardwired for God, we are hardwired for transcendence. On the other hand, we find ourselves always falling spectacularly short. We desire to be good in this world and yet we are so inclined to sin. We are sinners. Jesus teaches us we are created to love God with all of our heart, with all our mind, with all of our soul, and with all of our strength; and to love our neighbor as ourselves. This is clearly the meaning of life. I know that in my life my best days are the days when I feel love in my heart for God and for others. Is that true for you? It is so very true for me. When I feel love in my heart for God and for others, those are my best days. The trouble though is that all of us find ourselves in moments when, no matter how hard we try, we simply cannot love like we ought. We simply can’t. St. Paul lamented this in his own life and so did St. Augustine in his Confessions. We know we are made to love. We know how often we fail at it.

The Church talks about this basic brokenness inside of all of us as “original sin”. This is not to be confused with “personal sin”. Personal sin is when we fail because of a bad decision we make. Original sin is that brokenness in the heart of all humanity that inclines us to sin in the first place, to make bad decisions. The passages in the bible about Adam and Eve and the Tower of Babel speak of a time when we were in a right relationship with God and a moment when it all went wrong. These passages describe how the power of death enters our existence, blinding our vision of God’s eternal plan for us. These passages speak to our original vocation God had for us and God’s desire to bring us back to that vision.

For my part, I think it also makes sense that we, as a race, struggled with the use of our freedom from the very beginning because if the meaning of life is to love God and to love our neighbor, we cannot choose this unless we have the capacity to choose otherwise. Love to be love has to be free. However, once we fail repercussions follow. The bible speaks of the devil’s hand in tempting us away from God. If you don’t believe in the devil, trust me that is a mistake.

Angels have also been given freedom and some of them sinned against God too and are out there tempting us to do the same.

When it gets right down to it though, just as I know that my best days are when I feel love in my heart for God and for others, I know that my worst days are the days when I find myself using my freedom poorly. I bet the same is true for all of us. The good news is: God never gives up on us. God never gives up. The Old Testament is one story after the next about God calling his people to himself through covenants. Think Abraham, Isaac, Moses, etc. The Old Testament is also one story after the next of God's people breaking those covenants. Think Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, David and Solomon, the list goes on. The Bible as a whole is one long story about God never giving up on us, who will go to hell and back for us if necessary.

In the fullness of time, God sent us his only Son in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is one Person, fully divine and fully human. We call God becoming human for the sake of our salvation "the incarnation". One way of looking at the incarnation is as follows. When I was in kindergarten, I had a hard time learning to draw letters. I could see the teacher demonstrate writing the alphabet on the chalkboard, but I couldn't get my hand to reproduce the letter on my piece of paper. The teacher had to place her hand on my hand so that I could learn how to write. This is how I think of the incarnation. God becoming human in the person of Jesus is like God placing his hand on our hand so that we can learn what it means to be human again made in his image and likeness, follow? Every time Jesus healed someone miraculously in the Gospels, he was transforming our human nature to become more like his. Every time he taught us a parable, he was transforming our consciousness to become more like his. By dying on the cross and rising from the grave, Jesus transformed our mortality itself so that if we become one with him we will have everlasting life. Or as Jesus says so very clearly in John's Gospel, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that all who believe in him might not perish but have eternal life."

My friends, Jesus is the light that shines in the darkness which illuminates our existence, giving us meaning and giving us hope. As we stumble through life, trying to figure ourselves out, encountering Jesus is transformative because he alone can make any sense of us. He alone can save us. He alone can love us back into the person we are meant to be. What does that look like? Let's take a closer look at the Gospel reading I led off with. You see, the crucifixion was the darkest day in human history. The Son of God was nailed to a tree. How does Jesus respond to such violence? Jesus responded as he always responds... with love! "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do".

The Good Thief in the story is inspirational to me. The Catholic Church remembers his name as St. Dismas. And yes, the Church calls him a saint because the definition of a saint is someone who is in heaven. Dismas qualifies. He is a true inspiration and a sign of hope to me because Dismas didn't do a lot of things right in his life. In fact, he said he deserved to be crucified. However, he got one thing right at the very last moment. He gave his heart to Jesus. He didn't ask Jesus for anything other than, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom". Dismas got more than he could possibly have imagined. Jesus turned his gaze to Dismas and said, "This day you will be with me in Paradise!" Let that sink in.

You see, I believe all of humanity is like Dismas. As a human race, we find ourselves wounded over and over by our mistakes. The Good News is, whenever we feel crucified in life, where does Jesus want to be? Jesus wants to be with us, next to us, indeed he desires to be crucified for us in our place. That is the beauty of the cross! The cross says, even if I fall from the Father in heaven to hell itself who is there to catch me now but the arms of the Son? How is this possible except through the bond of the Holy Spirit? The passion, death and resurrection of our Lord is nothing less than a conspiracy of love that reveals a Triune God who desires to save all. That love is powerful. The only person in the universe that can confound God's desire for our salvation is us. That is what having free will means. As we also see in our Gospel reading, we can either accept Jesus' love for us or we can reject it. What good news though that no matter what sins we fall into, no matter what cross we have to carry, Jesus will love us to himself if we just turn our gaze to him. He will. Open your heart to him. His love has power over hell itself.

My friends, we began Revival with the basic starting point that God exists, he made you and he loves you. If there was only one thing I would ask you to remember about this evening of Revival, it is this. Jesus knows you, Jesus loves you, and Jesus saves you. Like last time, I could begin with saying "Jesus" and then you can say "knows me"...as in "Jesus" "knows me". I could then say "Jesus" a second time to which you can reply "loves me"...as in "Jesus" "loves me". And then I could say "Jesus" a third time to which you can reply "saves me" as in "Jesus" "saves me". Let's do this: Jesus "knows me". Jesus "loves me". Jesus "saves me". Jesus "knows me". Jesus "loves me". Jesus "saves me". Believe it!

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit as it was in the beginning, is now and every shall be, world without end. Amen.

Guidance for the rest of the evening

At this time, I get to guide you through what the rest of this evening. Like last time, we will begin with exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. It is an activity we call "adoration". We believe Jesus is truly present in the Holy Eucharist, body, blood, soul and divinity. Like I said last time, the Host sometimes feels like a window to heaven and an opportunity for prayer.

Soon after we begin adoration, I will then invite our young people enrolled for our Revival small groups to quietly move in the direction of their group leaders. The rest of us will stay and pray for them. A special word of thanks to our group leaders for their ministry to us and special thanks to Joe for providing prayerful meditative music this evening while we pray for our young people. The color on your nametags corresponds to the color of the flag your group leader will be holding up. These are not classrooms. That is the last thing you need. There is no expectation other than being present; however, you are welcome to participate. The questions for conversation will be:

1. What comes to mind when you hear the name of Jesus?
2. What did you hear from me tonight that may have surprised you or stood out to you?
3. Was there a time you can think of when Jesus answered a prayer?

There are no wrong answers. I hope you will consider joining the conversation. The main reason for these circles however is just an opportunity to offer a prayer at the end for whatever it

is you are asking of God for right now: it could be for a friend, relative or for yourself. You will be invited to light a candle representing that prayer. After your circle finishes up, you will be invited to bring that candle to place on the altar so to bring your prayer to Jesus. You will then be welcome to genuflect, make the sign of the cross, and go back to the pew so to pray for the others when they bring in their candles. I invite the group leaders to be back here by 7:50. The evening will wrap up shortly thereafter with a litany and benediction. My heartfelt gratitude to all of you for being here tonight. Please stand.